

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 EB-07 COME-00 SIL-01 LAB-04 CU-02 SCCT-01

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P R 021235Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6538

INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USCINCEUR

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 11756

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINS, ET

SUBJECT: DIRG'S CONFRONTATION WITH ETHIOPIAN WORKERS: EMBASSY'S
FURTHER VIEWS

REF: A)ADDIS ABABA 11667 (DTG 301526ZSEP75) AND PREVIOUS;
B) DAO'S 0648 OCT 75

DIRG CONFRONTATION WITH ETHIOPIAN WORKERS, PRINCIPALLY THOSE OF THE
ADDIS ABABA COMMERCIAL SECTOR, CONTINUES BUT MAY BE ENDING
ACCORDING TO LATE REPORTS (SEPTEL). IT IS NOT TOO SOON HOWEVER
TO EXAMINE SOME OF THE BROADER QUESTIONS, AND THAT IS THE
PURPOSE OF THIS MESSAGE.

1. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS
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OF WORKERS HAVE TRANSLATED THEIR OPPOSITION TO THE DIRG INTO

OVERT AND UNITED ACTION. ALTHOUGH THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT THE WILDCAT WORK STOPPAGES WHICH BEGAN ON SEPT. 30 IS FAIRLY CLEAR, MOTIVATIONS REMAIN ARGUABLE AND WERE CERTAINLY DIVERSE.

2. WE KNOW THAT CONFEDERATION
Y ETHIOPIAN LABOR UNIONS MCELU'S)
GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRODUCED A HEAVILY IDEOLOGICAL RESOLUTION (INSTANT SOCIALISM; FULL CIVIL LIBERTIES; PRICE, PAY AND TAK CONCESSIONS) BY SEPT. 24 WHICH OBVIOUSLY COULD NOT HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE DIRG. THE DIRG MUST HAVE BEEN KEPT INFORMED OF THE TENOR OF THE DEMAND BEING DISCUSSED
WITHIN THE CELU GENERAL ASSEMBLY, AND ON SEPT. 24 THE DIRG LET IT BE KNOWN THAT THE RESOLUTION WAS UNACCEPTABLE. YET ON SEPT. 25 THIS DOCUMENT WAS BEING DISTRIBUTED BY, AMONG OTHERS, ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES' UNION CADRES. WE CANNOT EXPLAIN WHY DIRG DID NOT MOVE DECISIVELY TO PREVENT ITS DRAFTING AND/OR DISSEMINATION. THE SHOOTING INCIDENT AT BOLE AIRPORT OCCURRED ON SEPT. 25 AND THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY WORK STOPPAGES IN ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES, BY A QUIET MASKAL HOLIDAY WEEKEND, BY GOVERNMENT WARNINGS TO REACTIONARIES, TROUBLEMAKERS AND TRAITORS OF DIRE ACTION SHOULD THEY FOMENT STRIKES AND ON SEPT. 30 (TUESDAY) BY SELECTIVE WALKOUTS SEEMINGLY OF WORKERS
FALLING INTO THE MORE PRIVILEGED
LABORING CATEGORIES (VIZ. EAL, SOME BANKS, SOME INSURANCE COMPANIES, SOME LIGHT MANUFACTURING).

3. ALTHOUGH, AS THE DEPT. IS WELL AWARE, THE DIRG DOES NOT LACK CRITICS WITHIN THE MILITARY, IT MANAGED QUICKLY TO CREATE TO ALL APPEARANCES A MILITARY CONSENSUS IN SUPPORT OF ITS POLICIES AND AGAINST THE WORKERS' DEMANDS.

4. CELU'S RANK AND FILE WAS WELL REPRESENTED AT ITS GENERAL ASSEMBLY BY INDIVIDUAL UNION LEADERS AND WE HAVE NO DOUBT THAT THE RESOLUTION'S BREAD AND BUTTER DEMANDS ACCURATELY EXPRESSED LABOR'S NEEDS. IT IS THE STRONG LEFT IDEOLOGICAL OVERLAY, HOWEVER, WHICH DRAWS OUR ATTENTION. THE DIRG IS CONDEMNED AS OPPRESSIVE, A PURVEYOR OF MILITARY PRIVILEGE. THE WORKING CLASS IS SUMMONED TO ORGANIZE DEMOCRATICALLY SO AS TO MAKE SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM A REALISTIC OPTION. STUDENTS, TEACHERS,
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ANDOTHER PROGRESSIVES ARE TO BE SUPPORTED. THESE POINTS LEAVE US WITH THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY ARE SECONDARY. THEY STRIKE US AS APPEALS TO OTHER ORGANIZED GROUPS FOR SUPPORT OF LABOR'S DEMANDS. THEY SEEM COUCHED IN A JARGON INTENDED TO PROVE THE WORKERS PROGRESSIVE BONA FIDES. IT SEEMS TO US THAT THE DRAFTERS OF THE DOCUMENT LIKELY WERE PRIMARILY PURSUING LABOR'S LONG-STANDING DEMANDS IN THE MOST ACCEPTABLE LANGUAGE OF THE DAY AND SEEKING ALLIES FOR THEIR PURPOSES IN OTHER LIKELY QUARTERS.

5. WHY DIDN'T THE DIRG STOP DISTRIBUTION OF THE DOCUMENT? MOST LIKELY BECAUSE ITS CONSULTATIVE AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES ON THE ONE HAND AND THE NUMBER OF COPIES DISTRIBUTED TO THE ESTIMATED 250 PARTICIPANTS IN CELU'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE OTHER, DID NOT PERMIT. WE THINK THE MOST LOGICAL EXPLANATION, THEN, IS THAT SOME INDIVIDUALS WITH COPIES WERE BUSILY REPRODUCING AND DISTRIBUTING THEM BEFORE THE DIRG COULD ACT.

6. WE HAVE ALREADY NOTED THAT THOSE WHO EVENTUALLY WALKED OFF THEIR JOBS SEEM TO COME PRIMARILY FROM LABOR'S MOST REGARDED ELITE. IN OTHER WORDS, LIKE EAL AND OTHER RELATIVELY WELL-OFF WORKERS, THEY BELONG TO A CLASS WHICH HAS BEEN THE PARTICULAR TARGET OF SOCIALIST ETHIOPIA'S CURRENT LEADERS. IT IS THEREFORE NOT SURPRISING TO FIND THEM IN THE FOREFRONT OF THOSE PREPARED TO ACT OUT THEIR ANTI-DIRG CONVICTIONS. OPINION IN THIS EMBASSY IS DIVIDED ON THE DEGREE AND NATURE OF DISSATISFACTION WITH THE DIRG AMONG LESS PRIVILEGED WORKERS. SOME POINT OUT THAT AT THESE LEVELS THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE IF ANY CONSTRICTION IN EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND THAT NEW JOBS IN PUBLIC WORKS HAVE BEEN CREATED FOR MANY UNSKILLED WORKERS. WHILE PRICES HAVE RISEN, NO DOUBT PAINFULLY FOR THE LEAST PAID, EFFORTS HAVE ALSO BEEN MADE TO BENEFIT PRECISELY THIS GROUP, FOR EXAMPLE BY REDUCING RENTS. AND THE GOVERNMENT REPEATEDLY ASSERTS THAT THE REVOLUTION IS FOR THE MASS OF ETHIOPIA'S LEAST PRIVILEGED CHILDREN. OTHERS CONSIDER THAT THE DIRG'S VIOLENCE NOT ONLY IN ERITREA BUT IN OTHER PARTS OF THE EMPIRE, THE DISLOCATIONS WHICH THE REVOLUTION HAS BROUGHT TO PEOPLE'S DAILY LIVES, STUDENT EXCESSES, THE DISCREDITING OF ELDERS AND OTHER TRADITIONAL LEADERS, THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE DIRG'S EGALITARIAN RHETORIC AND SELF-SERVING MILITARY PRIVILEGE HAVE ALL CONTRIBUTED TO A WIDENING ALIENATION ALSO WITHIN THE URBAN UNDERCLASS. BE THAT AS IT MAY, IT SEEMS TO US IN ANY EVENT LIKELY THAT THE ECONOMIC COSTS TO THE WORKERS

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OF AN OPEN-ENDED POLITICAL STRIKE--PARTICULARLY FOR THOSE LEAST AND LIVING CLOSEST TO THE MARGIN-- WHEN ADDED TO THE FEAR OF REPRISALS BY A RUTHLESS DIRG, ADEQUATELY ACCOUNT FOR THE PASSIVITY OF MANY WORKERS IN THE FACE OF EVENTS. AS IS USUAL IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, MOST PEOPLE PREFER TO LEAVE MILITANCY TO OTHERS BETTER ABLE TO PROTECT THEMSELVES OR TO AFFORD THE COST.

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AMEMBHHSY MOGADISCIO

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 11756

7. WE WOULD SPECULATE THAT THERE IS SIMILAR THINKING AMONG THE DIRG'S MILITARY SUPPORTERS. THEY, ALSO, WILL HAVE HAD TO WEIGH WHATEVER PRIVATE RESERVATIONS MANY OF THEM (AS EX-LANDOWNERS AND INVESTORS) MAY HARBOR, AGAINST THE COSTS THEY AND THE WHOLE COUNTRY WOULD INCUR BY BREAKING MILITARY SOLIDARITY IN A TEST OF STRENGTH AGAINST A LABOR/STUDENT/IDEOLOGUE COALITION. HOWEVER, OVER THE LONGER-TERM MILITARY SOLIDARITY REMAINS OPEN TO QUESTION AND THERE CLEARLY HAVE BEEN STRAINS ON IT. WE HAVE HEARD FROM VARIOUS SOURCES OF THE ARREST OF SEVERAL OFFICERS IN JIJIGA (WHERE THE TANKS ARE, INCLUDING THOSE WHICH WE ARE TOLD HAVE BEEN ORDERED TO ADDIS). AND WE HAVE NOW RECEIVED REPORTS OF A LARGE-SCALE RESHUFFLE OF SENIOR MILITARY ASSIGNMENTS HERE (CF REF. B).

8. IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT STUDENT RADICALS HAVE NOT TAKEN ANY
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OPEN ROLE IN SUPPORT OF WORKERS' DEMANDS, BUT NO DOUBT INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS ARE EGGING THEM ON BEHIND THE SCENES.

9. WHAT OPTIONS DOES THE DIRG NOW HAVE? COERCION HAS ITS LIMITS
ALTHOUGH ITS POTENCY IN THIS COUNTRY OF LIMITED ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITIES SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED. SOME WORKERS WHO DO
NOT COME TO WORK IN RESPONSE TO THREATS CAN BE FIRED AND REPLACED
BY OTHERS PRESUMABLY ONLY TOO EAGER TO FIND WORK. KEY SKILLED
EMPOLYEEES CAN BE SEARCHED OUT AND PRESSURED INDIVIDUALLY. THE
DIRG HAS OTHER OPTIONS AS WELL. IT COULD PROMULGATE LONG-DELAYED
NEW LABOR LEGISLATION THAT IS ALREADY IN AN ADVANCE STAGE
OF PREPARATION. SUCH LEGISLATION CAN BE MADE TO REFLECT MANY OF
LABOR'S ASPIRATIONS AND PRESENTED AS EVIDENCE OF THE DIRG'S
INTEREST IN THE WORKING MAN'S WELFARE. (THIS COULD CUT TWO WAYS,
HOWEVER, BECAUSE WE UNDERSTAND THAT CERTAIN NEW REGULATIONS
INTEND A LEVELLING-DOWN OF HIGHER WAGES WHICH WOULD BE DISAPPOINTING
TO MANY OF THE BETTER-OFF WORKERS WHO ARE OFTEN THE MOST MILI-
TANTLY ANTI-DIRG.) RECOURSE CAN ALSO BE HAD TO OVERT OR
COVERT FINANCIAL INDUCEMENTS TO EMPLOYEES OR INDIVIDUAL LABOR
LEADERS. LASTLY, AN ATTEMPT IS ALREADY UNDER WAY TO DEFUSE
THE CONFRONTATION BY FINGERING OTHER VILLAINS (THE ERITREANS
AND TIGRES) AS "OUTSIDE AGITATORS" WITH DISTRUCTIVE MOTIVES.
THE DEPT. WILL HAVE NOTED THE REFERENCES TO ERITREAN MACHINAT-
IONS IN RECENT GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS (CF FBIS LONDON 301554Z
SEPT75) AND ALLUSIONS TO TRAITORS MOTIVATED BY FOREIGN AGENTS
WHO SEEK TO DIIRDE ETHIOPIA'S PEOPLES' AND TERRITORY TO
THEIR OWN ENDS. THIS IS A POTENT THREAT TO ANY ERITREAN OR
TIGRE (AS MANY EAL AND WHITE-COLLAR WORKERS ARE) BECAUSE EPMG
TREATMENT OF SUSPECTED ELF AGENTS IS FAR HARDER THAN OF ORDINARY
WORKERS.
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